

SFRC Hearing on Yemen

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Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Menendez, and distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on our Yemen policy. I welcome discussion on this important issue.

Strategic Overview

As Secretary Mattis has said many times, our goal in Yemen is an end to the conflict through a United Nations (UN)-brokered settlement. The conflict in Yemen affects regional security across the Middle East and threatens U.S. national security interests. We need a stable, inclusive government in Yemen to provide security to the Yemeni people and to reduce and ultimately eliminate terrorist safe havens that are being used by al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria in Yemen (ISIS-Y) to plot against the American people and our allies and partners. Finding a political solution to the Yemen conflict will also help counter Iran by reducing the chaos in which it thrives. Ultimately, Iran has fueled and exploited this conflict, and ending it will help to reduce opportunities for Iran's malign activities.

The Administration's policy goals in Yemen are to prevent terrorist attacks on U.S. interests and allies, end the civil war, avoid a regional conflict, mitigate the humanitarian crisis, help defend Saudi Arabia's territorial integrity, and protect the free flow of commerce in the Red Sea. We support the new UN Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths, in his attempts to revive the UN-led peace process in Yemen.

President Obama first directed U.S. military support to the Saudi-led Coalition in 2015, after the Houthis, along with forces aligned with former Yemen President Saleh, broke their truce with the internationally-recognized President of Yemen Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, and stormed the Presidential palace in Sana'a. President Hadi escaped and fled to Aden and ultimately to Saudi Arabia. At President Hadi's request, Saudi Arabia formed an international coalition to help restore government control, and DoD began providing limited, non-combat support to that Coalition. The UN Security Council also passed Resolution 2216, condemning the takeover of Sana'a and calling on Houthi-Saleh forces to turn over looted weapons, withdraw from Sana'a, and begin political discussions.

The Houthis, supported by Iran, continue to pose a threat to the Yemeni people, to the Coalition, to Americans in the region, and to regional security. In addition to exacerbating the civil conflict, the Houthis use child soldiers, disrupt the flow of commercial goods, and charge additional tariffs and taxes on essential goods for their own financial gain. The Houthis also directly threaten the security of Saudi Arabia. To date, the Houthis have launched more than 100 ballistic missiles into Saudi Arabia, directed at major population centers, international airports, and military installations, including bases where U.S. forces are present. They have also fired countless rockets into southern Saudi Arabia and continue to occupy Saudi territory along the

Yemeni border. Just this month, the Houthis attacked another Saudi oil tanker in the Red Sea, threatening commercial shipping and freedom of navigation in the world's fourth busiest maritime chokepoint. For Saudis and Emiratis, whose citizens are under attack or threat of attack from Iranian-backed forces, the conflict in Yemen is a core national security interest.

Counterterrorism Efforts

The Department's first line of effort in Yemen is the fight against terrorist organizations that threaten U.S. national security interests in the region and at home. AQAP continues to pose a significant threat to the American people by plotting attacks against the homeland, while ISIS-Y aims to use the ungoverned spaces of Yemen to plot, direct, instigate, supply, and recruit for attacks in the region.

To combat AQAP and ISIS-Y, a small number of U.S. forces, in coordination with the internationally-recognized Government of Yemen, are supporting our regional counterterrorism partners in ongoing operations to degrade the groups' abilities to coordinate external terrorist operations and blunt their aspirations to use Yemen as a safe haven for terror plotting. Additionally, U.S. forces are conducting airstrikes against AQAP and ISIS-Y pursuant to the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force, to disrupt and destroy terrorist leadership networks and limit their freedom of maneuver within the region. Our partners provide critical assistance to our counterterrorism efforts and, like us, they are determined to rid Yemen of these terrorist groups while setting the conditions for a stable environment that does not provide safe haven for terrorist groups or activity.

U.S. Support to the Saudi-led Coalition

Our second line of effort includes providing limited, non-combat support to the Saudi-led Coalition in support of the internationally-recognized Government of Yemen. This support began in 2015 under President Obama, and in 2017, President Trump reaffirmed our commitment to our partners in their efforts. Fewer than 50 U.S. military personnel work in Saudi Arabia with the Saudi-led Coalition advising and assisting with the defense of Saudi territory, sharing intelligence, and providing logistical support, including aerial refueling.

U.S. forces are not participants in the civil conflict in Yemen and are not engaged in hostilities against the Houthis. U.S. military support to the Coalition is consistent with the National Defense Strategy. We are working to support our partners' military efforts to defend themselves and maintain their own security. This support helps improve our bilateral and regional partnerships, bolster our partners' defense, and increase burden sharing.

We are focused on helping the Coalition avoid civilian casualties in Yemen. We recognize that this conflict has taken a drastic toll on the Yemeni people. We believe that working with our Saudi and Emirati counterparts helps mitigate the risk of civilian casualties. U.S. military advisors are focused on helping Coalition forces implement best practices and procedures to reduce civilian casualties and collateral damage. Aerial refueling allows Coalition aircraft to spend more time in the air, thus giving our partners time to validate targets, practice tactical patience, and reduce the risk of civilian casualties.

We are seeing incremental improvements to our partners' processes and procedures. The Coalition has incorporated the No Strike List into its target development procedures, stopped the use of cluster munitions, changed its rules of engagement to incorporate U.S. best practices, and

increased its use of precision-guided munitions, which help decrease civilian casualties and collateral damage. We can only help avoid unnecessary loss of life if we continue to engage with these partners to improve their practices.

U.S. Efforts to Mitigate the Humanitarian Crisis

The U.S. government is also working to mitigate the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict. The United States has provided more than \$854 million in humanitarian assistance since October 2016, including nearly \$87 million in additional funding this month. We are also providing \$55 million in economic and development assistance, which have been notified to Congress, to help lay a foundation for Yemen's recovery, including through programs to support livelihoods, rehabilitate critical infrastructure, such as water systems, and restore access to education so children can learn and prepare for their future. The U.S. government continues to urge all parties to allow humanitarian and commercial goods, including fuel, to enter Yemen and move unhindered throughout the country, while also allowing humanitarian workers to move freely and safely to deliver assistance.

Consequences of Reducing or Withdrawing U.S. Support

DoD strongly opposes any reduction or withdrawal of U.S. support to the Saudi-led Coalition. It bears repeating: we can only help influence a positive outcome in Yemen by engaging with our partners. To leave our partners to face this threat without our support would risk greater escalation and attendant harm to civilians. Further, if we hope to encourage a political settlement, we must have influence with our partners in the region. Our support shows we take seriously our partners' struggle against a real security threat to the region -- thereby strengthening our broader argument that only a political solution will end the conflict.

With Iran's support, the Houthis have exacerbated this civil war and raised the risk of a larger regional conflict. The Houthis have used, with Iranian material and expertise: (1) sophisticated ballistic missiles to attack major Saudi population centers; (2) missiles to attack commercial vessels in the Red Sea; (3) explosive boats to attack military vessels in the Red Sea; and (4) explosive UAV attacks against civilian targets in Saudi Arabia. Consistent with the National Security Strategy's call to neutralize Iran's destabilizing activities, DoD is committed to working with our partners and allies to prevent proliferation from Iran. Mr. Chairman, I invite you and the other members of the committee to see first-hand evidence of Iranian complicity by visiting the Iranian Material Display at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling. This display includes the Iranian-manufactured ballistic missile launched at Riyadh International Airport in November 2017, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, and explosive boat components.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, let me conclude by emphasizing our respect for Congress's important oversight role in the use of military force. We have shared the Administration's legal analysis regarding U.S. non-combat support to the Saudi-led coalition, and I would like to reiterate that U.S. forces are not engaged in hostilities in the civil conflict in Yemen.

Instead, we view our U.S. military support to the Saudi-led Coalition in Yemen through the lens of the National Defense Strategy. As our partners help us with our strategic priorities in the region – especially in countering AQAP, ISIS-Y, and other violent extremist organizations – we enable them to combat the current highest threat to their security, attacks against their territory.

Working with our partners to mitigate and reduce the risks of a regional conflict will also create opportunities to counter the regional purveyors of instability, namely Iran.

In this light, withdrawing our support to the Saudi-led Coalition could threaten our other defense relationships and weaken our global reputation as a reliable partner. This would constrain the U.S. military's ability to foster long-term relationships, to increase interoperability, to promote burden sharing, and to build strong security partnerships throughout the world.

I ask for your continued support to the Department as we work to enable our partners.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.